

Message Text

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11
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FM AMEMBASSY PORT MORESBY

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1725

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

AMEMBASSY MANILA

AMEMBASSY RANGOON

AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

S E C R E T PORT MORESBY 0865

E.O. 11652: XGDS-2

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SUBJ: PERCEPTIONS OF SOVIET MILITARY PRESENCE IN PACIFIC

REF: STATE 187556

1. DEGREE OF AWARENESS OF SOVIET NAVNAL DEVELOPMENTS IN PACIFIC IS QUITE LIMITED IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA. DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN AFFIARS AND TRADE (DFAT) WROTE AUSTRALIAN HIGH COMMISSION IN JUNE ASKING FOR WHATEVER INFORMATION GOA MIGHT HAVE ON SINO-SOVIET ACTIVITIES IN PACIFIC, AND THIS WAS FOLLOWED BY REQUEST FOR DISCUSSION ON SUBJECT BETWEEN FONMIN KIKI AND GOA DURING VISIT TO CANBERRA IN EARLY JULY. CLOSED SEMINAR ON FOREIGN POLICY FOR BENEFIT OF DFAT AND OTHER GPNG OFFICIALS IN MID-JULY INCLUDED PAPERS PRESENTED BY ACADEMICIANS ON SINO-SOVIET ACTIVITIES IN PACIFIC. GPNG WAS EAGER TO DISCUSS SUBJECT INFORMALLY AT SP FORUM MEETING IN NAURU IN LATE JULY.

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2. AWARENESS EXTENDS, WE BELIEVE, TO SMALL GROUP IN

GOVT (DFAT, A FEW TOP MILITARY OFFICERS, AND SOME PEOPLE AROUND PRIME MINISTER) BUT PROBABLY NOT TO PARLIAMENT, MOST MILITARY AND GOVT OFFICIALS, NOR TO GENERAL PUBLIC. ONLY DAILY PAPER IS AUSTRALIAN-OWNED AND EDITED, AND WHILE EDITOR IS UNDOUBTEDLY AWARE OF SOVIET ACTIVITY, IT IS NOT A SUBJECT HE HARPS ON.

3. WE UNDERSTAND THAT AWARENESS OF POSSIBLE SOVIET ACTIVITY IN WATERS OF BOTH PNG AND SOLOMON ISLANDS HAS BEEN HEIGHTENED BY REPEATED SIGHTINGS OF UNIDENTIFIED SUBMARINES WHICH SURFACE IN WATERS OF PNG AND SOLOMONS. WE ARE TOLD THAT THESE SUBMARINES HAVE NO VISIBLE MARKINGS, THAT PERSONNEL APPEAR, SCAN THE HORIZON WITH BINOCULARS, GO BELOW, AND THEN THE SUBMARINE DISAPPEARS.

4. AWARENESS IS NOT AS YET SUFFICIENT TO SIGNIFICANTLY ALTER OR OFFSET VIEWS ON WIDER SECURITY AND POLITICAL ISSUES. PRELIMINARY REACTION OF A FEW OFFICIALS IN DK M WHO ARE THINKING A LITTLE ABOUT THZDISSUE IS TO WISH THAT ALL OF GREAT POWERS WOULD WITHDRAW FROM PACIFIC AND LEAVE THE PACIFIC ISLAND NATIONS ALONE. THESE OFFICIALS HAVE SAID FROM TIME TO TIME THAT THEY DON'T WANT TO SEE THE PACIFIC CARVED INTO SPHERES OF INFLUENCE. OLDER OFFICIALS WHO CAN REMEMBER WORLD WAR II, HOWEVER, ARE A LITTLE MORE AWARE OF THE REALITIES OF SUPER POWER POLITICS.

5. GPNG IS VERY TIMOROUS IN DEALING WITH MAJOR POWERS, AND SERIOUS BLUNDER BY USSR COULD BRING ABOUT STRONG ANTI-SOVIET REACTION. SOVIET MUSCLE-FLEXING IN THIS AREA COULD CREATE ANTI-SOVIET ATMOSPHERE WHICH MIGHT POSSIBLY CREATE AN ENHANCED PRO-US MOOD ALTHOUGH IT MIGHT ALSO INTENSIFY WISH THAT ALL SUPER-POWERS WOULD WITHDRAW FROM PACIFIC.

6. THE RUMOR THAT A COMMUNIST COUNTRY (PRESUMABLY USSR) IS SUPPLYING (OR IS TRYING TO SUPPLY) ARMS TO THE IRIANESE DISSIDENT GROUPS SURFACES FROM TIME TO TIME (IT WAS IN YESTERDAY'S PAPER AGAIN), AND IF IRREFUTABLE EVIDENCE SHOULD EMERGE CONFIRMING THIS RUMOR, BELIEVE

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GPNG WOULD REACT VERY ADVERSELY.

7. TO SPECULATE FURTHER, SHOULD THERE BE SOVIET SUPPORT (MILITARY OR DIPLOMATIC) OF THE BOUGAINVILLE SEPARATISTS, SUCH SUPPORT WOULD BITTERLY ANTAGONIZE AND FRIGHTEN GPNG AND PEOPLE OF PNG. BELIEVE THEY

COULDREACT VERY ADVERSELY. BOUGAINVILLE SITUATION

PRESENTLY SEEMS MORE RELAXED THAN IT HAS BEEN FOR A YEAR, BUT POSSIBILITY EXISTS THAT IT COULD AGAIN DETERIORATE AND THAT SOVIETS COULD EXPLOIT ANY SUCH DETERIORATION.

8. JAPAN IS IMPORTANT COMMERCIALY IN PNG AND EVEN MORE SO IN SOLOMON ISLANDS. THIS IMPORTANCE HAS DEVELOPED AT EXPENSE OF AUSTRALIAN COMMERCIAL PRESENCE. NEITHER PNG NOR THE SOLOMONS, WE BELIEVE, WOULD LOOK TO JAPAN AS A COUNTERBALANCE TO USSR, AND WE HAVE NO REASON TO BELIEVE PERCEPTIONS TOWARDS JAPAN WOULD CHANGE AS THE RESULT OF SOVIET ACTIVITY.
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